

THE
HALFWAY
COVENANT.
A DIALOGUE.

By JOSEPH BELLAMY, D. D.

*And look that thou make them after their Pattern,
which was shewed thee in the Mount.*

JEHOVAH.

*Teaching them to observe all Things whatsoever I
have commanded you : And lo I am with you.*

JESUS CHRIST.

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C O N T E N T S.



THE friendly Manner in which dissatisfied Parishioners ought to apply to their Minister, and the kind Reception he ought to give them—no Texts of Scripture for the Half-Way-Covenant—a brief History of its Origin—the Sentiments of common People about it—the original plan—the present Sentiments and Practice inconsistent with Mather's Scheme—and with Stoddard's Scheme—and with Scripture—and with Common-Sense—Covenants not requiring real Holiness, a human Device—give no Title to the Seals of God's Covenant—Baptism administered without a Divine Warrant, neither lawful nor useful—Christ's Commission, and the Apostles Practice—the Nature of Baptism, and when a Man may be said to desire it for his Children—the Way in which all Parents may have their Children regularly baptized, if it be not their own Fault—their Duty stated and urged.



A D I A L O G U E.

Between a MINISTER and his PARISHIONER,
concerning the HALF-WAY-COVENANT.



PARISHIONER. **S**IR, I am dissatisfied with a part of your public conduct, and am come to open my mind freely to you, if you will be so kind as to allow me an opportunity.

MINISTER. Sir, I am now at leisure, and at your service, and your honest frankness gives me pleasure. Between you and me alone to let me know the objections you have against any part of my conduct, is to act a friendly part. It is more kind and christian-like, than to keep your thoughts to yourself, to engender a secret disaffection in your heart.—It is much more friendly than to rail against me behind my back, all round the parish. And you may be quite assured, that not only now, but in all future times, I shall with pleasure listen to any objections against my public administrations proposed in a friendly, candid manner ; and will be ready to be set right, wherein I am wrong ; or to let you know the reasons of my conduct. For next to the light of God's countenance, and the approbation of my own conscience, I prize the good opinion of my fellow-men : And particularly, I greatly prize the testimony of the consciences of my own people in my behalf. To your conscience, therefore, I am now willing to approve myself. Open your mind without the least reserve.

P. I have lately moved into the parish ; I had owned the covenant in the town I came from ;—my other children have been baptized—we have now another child born ; and I hear you refuse to baptize the children of any but those who are in full communion : This gives me pain.

M. I cannot give you pain, without feeling pain myself. But you would not desire, that I should go counter to the will of my Lord and Master, while acting in his Name, as his minister ; nor would this be a likely means to obtain a blessing for your child. And if I am warranted by the gospel of Christ to baptize your child, you are very sensible, my reputation, and every worldly interest, will join to prompt me to it. You will easily make a convert of me to your opinion, if you can point out one text of scripture to justify that common practice.

P. I have not studied the point. I cannot mention any text of scripture ; but it is the custom where I was born and brought up ; and I knew not but that it was the custom every where, 'till I moved into this parish.

M. No, Sir, it is not the custom every where ; it was not the custom where I was born and brought up ; and there are many churches in the country, that are not in the practice. At the first settling of New-England, there was, so far as I know, not one church that allowed baptism to the children of any but those whose parents were one or both in full communion. About 40 years after the first church was formed, this custom was brought in by a Synod that met at Boston 1662. Many ministers and churches zealously opposed it at the time, and even to this day, the custom is not become universal : And of late a considerable number of churches, who had adopted the practice, have laid it aside. It is not practised at all in the church of Scotland, as I have been informed by a Rev. Gentleman of an established reputation, who has lately been invited, and who has removed from thence, to the Presidency of New-Jersey College. And it is certain
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the confession of faith, catechisms and directory of the church of Scotland, make no mention of it : Neither is the practice mentioned in the Say-Brook platform, which has been generally received by the churches in Connecticut ; for the council which met at Say-Brook, did not see cause to adopt that practice, although it had been introduced by the Synod at Boston.—But if you had not studied the point before you owned the covenant ; and if you took it for granted, that it was right, merely from education, yet you are able to let me know in what views, and from what motives you owned the covenant : As I suppose you meant to act conscientiously.

P. It was the common opinion that none ought to join in full communion, and come to the Lord's table, but those that were godly, that had on a *wedding garment, lest coming unworthily, they eat and drink damnation to themselves*. But it was thought that graceless persons might own the covenant, and have their children baptized ; and this was my opinion, and I acted on these principles.

M. Yes, Sir, and I suppose the generality of people in the country, that own the covenant, in these times, act on these principles : But it was not so from the beginning. The Synod in 1662, who first brought in the practice, were not in this scheme. It was known, and owned, and publicly declared on all hands, in the time of it ; “ That the Synod did acknowledge, that there ought to be true saving faith in the parent, according to the judgment of rational charity, or else the child ought not to be baptized.” *

P. But, Sir, I am surprised ! Is this true ? Was this really the opinion of those who first brought in this practice ?

M. It is true, it was indeed their opinion, if we may give credit to their own declarations. No man who was
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* See a Defence of the Answer and Arguments of the Synod, &c. against the Reply made by the Rev. Mr. John Davenport, Pastor of the Church at New-Haven. Preface, pag. 23, 24.

for this practice, was of more note than the Rev. Dr. Increase Mather, of Boston, who was a member of the Synod, and afterwards wrote in defence of this practice; and no author can in more express language declare his sentiments. These are his own words, in a pamphlet, entituled, *A discourse concerning the subject of Baptism, wherein the present Controversies that are agitated in the New-England Churches are from scripture & reason modestly enquired into*, pag. 52, 53. "In the fifth place, it may be alledged, that the persons in question, either have to the judgment of charity, a justifying faith, or not. If not, they, and consequently their children, are not baptizable. If yea, then they are forthwith admittable to the Lord's-supper. Answer.

"1. I do readily acknowledge, that as it is only a justifying faith which giveth right to baptism before God; so it is the profession or visibility of this faith, that giveth right thereunto before the church. Some have maintained that a *dogmatical historical* faith, or a faith of *assent* to the truth of the gospel, doth entitle to baptism. But the common protestant doctrine against the papists, speaketh otherwise. Though a man should believe all that the holy scriptures say concerning God and Christ, yet if he doth not consent with his heart, that this God shall be *his God*, and this Christ *his Saviour*, he hath not right to baptism in the sight of God; or if he doth not *profess* such a *consent*, (which is implied in the proposition before us, when it is said concerning the persons in question, that they *gave up themselves to the Lord*) he cannot justly claim baptism. In most churches in the world, men own the creed, (called the Apostles) before baptism. Now therein they say, I believe [in] God, and not only I believe God, viz. with a faith of assent only in the understanding. Now to believe *in* God, implieth a *consent of the will*, choosing this God for my God. And considering that in baptism, there is a profession of repentance for past transgressions,

“gressions, and an engagement to walk in newness of life
 “for time to come, *Mark* i. 4. 2 *Pet.* i. 9. And that it
 “cometh in the room of circumcision, which was a seal of
 “the righteousness of faith, *Rom.* iv. 11. And that there-
 “by remission of sins is sealed, *Acts* ii. 38. Which re-
 “mission is not promised to any faith but justifying ; also
 “that baptism is said to save, 1 *Pet.* iii. 21. And they
 “that are baptized are said to be in Christ, *Gal.* iii. 27.
 “And to have communion with Christ in respect of his
 “death and resurrection, *Rom.* vi. 4, 5. *Col.* ii. 12. I say,
 “from these and many the like considerations, I am fully
 “persuaded that it is not a mere historical, but justifying
 “faith which giveth right to baptism.”

These are his words, and they are as plain and express
 as could be desired.

P. But if this was in fact the case, I cannot conceive
 what room there was for the half-way covenant ! For such
 persons might consistently profess to comply with the
 whole covenant, and not stop half-way in practice, but
 come up to all ordinances.

M. You are right in this observation. Persons so qual-
 ified, who have been brought up under the light of the
 gospel from their infancy, by pious parents, and godly
 ministers, and now adult, and become godly themselves,
 professing and practising accordingly ; are in a judgment
 of rational charity, as fit for the Lord's table, as to offer
 their children in baptism. Nor is it merely a privilege
 they may claim, to come to the Lord's supper along with
 their christian brethren, and join with them in commemo-
 rating the death of Christ ; but it is their indispensable
 duty. They are bound to do it by the express command
 of Christ, *Luk.* xxii. 19. *This do in remembrance of me.*
 And to neglect it, is practically to renounce the authority
 of Jesus Christ. And is it right for ministers to teach the
 disciples of Christ to live in the breach of the least of his
 commands ?

P. But what would Dr. Mather say to this ?

M. You

M. You may hear, for these are his words : (P. 54.)—
 “ It will not follow that these persons are immediately to
 “ be admitted to the Lord’s table, or to the privileges of
 “ full communion. For *more full and satisfactory eviden-*
 “ *ces* of regeneration and of christian proficiency, are re-
 “ quisite in order to admission to the Lord’s table, than
 “ in order to baptism.” And if you will read *Mather’s*
Magnalia, you will see, that they insisted on *Initial grace* in
 order to baptism, but supposed greater attainments necessary
 in order to the Lord’s supper. But if that command of
 Christ is binding on weak christians, who are indeed real
 christians, *Luk. xxii. 19.* To say they are not to be ad-
 mitted to the Lord’s table, is to say, it is not lawful they
 should obey the command of Christ. So this half-way-
 covenant while it teaches for doctrine the commandment
 of men sets aside the command of Christ.

P. I am in the same opinion—nor can I see any room for
 the half-way-covenant on *Mather’s* scheme : But I have
 heard that *Stoddard’s* scheme favours the present practice.

M. This is a mistake. Mr. Stoddard of Northampton,
 never practiced the half-way, i. e. he never admitted
 any to have baptism for their children, but those who were
 in full communion, and he expressly declares that those who
 have been baptized in infancy, and owned their covenant,
 are obliged in duty to come to the Lord’s table. Yea, he
 says, (appeal p. 63, edit. 2.) “ It is a scandal if they do
 “ not, and the church may call them to an account for
 “ their neglect. It is a visible contempt cast upon the or-
 “ dinance.” He held the Lord’s supper to be a converting
 ordinance : And that unconverted men knowing themselves
 to be such, might lawfully come. And that it was as law-
 ful to come to the Lord’s supper, as to baptism, (p. 77.)
 so that there was no room for any half-way-covenant or
 half-way-practice, on his scheme. For unconverted men
 knowing themselves to be such may on his scheme come not
 only half-way, but to all ordinances, and to one as well as
 to another.

P. I never heard of these things till now, and I know not what to think or what to say. It seems as if the half-way-covenant, and the half-way-practice, could not be made consistent on any scheme.

M. If the covenant owned is the covenant of grace, and if the parent acts understandingly and honestly in the affair, he is a good man, he has a right before God to baptism for his children, and an equal right to the Lord's supper : Yea, that command of Christ in *Luke xxii. 19.* renders it his indispensable duty to attend the Lord's supper. * But if the covenant owned is not the covenant of grace, those who have owned it have in the sight of God no right to either of those ordinances which are seals of that covenant, and of no other : No more right than if they had given their assent to any chapter in the apocrypha.—Did you never hear it observed and talked of, that those who own the covenant make as full and large a profession as they who join in full communion ?

P. Yes. And my former minister read the same covenant to such as owned the covenant, as he did to those that joined in full communion, word for word, only one did not promise to come up to all ordinances, and the other did. And I must confess this sometimes stumbled me.

M. If you please, sir, I will repeat the covenant we use when any join in full communion, the same that was read to me by my minister, when I joined to the church about three and thirty years ago. A brief summary of it is this,—“You do now in the presence of the dread Majesty
“ of Heaven and Earth, and before angels and men, in
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* Under the Jewish dispensation it was lawful for an Israelite, not hindered by any external impediment, voluntarily to absent himself from the passover, if he was ceremonially unclean. But under the gospel an Israelite indeed, of sufficient age and understanding, and not hindered by any natural impediment, may not voluntarily absent himself from the Lord's supper, unless disqualified by spiritual uncleanness, by his own personal wickedness unrepented of, or for which he has not made gospel satisfaction. And such an one is equally unfit to offer his child in baptism. Num. 9. 13. Mat. 5. 23, 24.

“ the sincerity of your soul, avouch the Lord Jehovah to
 “ be your sovereign Lord, and supreme Good, thro’ Jesus
 “ Christ; and solemnly devote and give up yourself to his
 “ fear and service, to walk in all his ways and keep all his
 “ commands, seeking his glory,” &c. And is this more
 full and express than your former minister used when per-
 sons owned the covenant ?

P. I think not, it is very much like it.

M. So far as I am acquainted, the forms in use all over
 the country, a very few instances excepted, are very much
 alike. The only difference of any consequence lies in
 practice. I think it my duty, in private, as well as public;
 to explain the covenant, and to see to it, that persons un-
 derstand it before they make it, and know what they are
 about to do, and are sufficiently instructed that it is a
 wicked thing to *lie to God with their mouths and flatter him
 with their lips.*

P. Very well, sir, no doubt this is a minister’s duty.
 But, alas for me, I never knew what I was about, nor con-
 sidered the import of the words, I publicly gave my con-
 sent unto. I knew myself to be unconverted.— I meant
 to own the covenant, as the phrase is, and have my children
 baptized; but I had no design to profess godliness, or to
 pretend a real compliance with the covenant of grace. This
 godly people may do : But it had been great hypocrisy
 in me to do it. To lie to men is bad, but to lie to God
 is worse. I supposed that owning the covenant was what
 the unconverted might do.

M. How can a man that knows himself to be uncon-
 verted, dead in sin, and destitute of the grace of God;
 stand up before the whole congregation, and say, “ I do
 “ now in the presence of the dread Majesty of Heaven and
 “ Earth, and before angels and men, avouch the Lord
 “ Jehovah to be my sovereign Lord, and supreme Good,
 “ through Jesus Christ, and solemnly devote and give up
 “ myself to his fear and service, to walk in all his ways,
 “ and keep all his commands, seeking his glory” ?—

P. I

P. I freely own I knew not what I did, when I owned the covenant.—But you hinted just now, that this is not the custom in all the churches where the half-way-practice takes place.

M. I have heard of a few churches where the ministers have of late drawn up a new form for those who own the covenant, essentially different from that which is used when any one is admitted to full communion ; which new form designedly leaves out the covenant of grace, and contains a profession, which unconverted men may make, and yet speak true. And this, with greater propriety, may be called the half-way-covenant, although indeed, it does not go half-way, and gives no right to those ordinances which are seals of the covenant of grace. Besides, God never did propose any covenant to mankind, but which required real holiness on man's part ; and any covenant short of this, is a mere human device. It is teaching for doctrine the commandment of men, directly contrary to the express orders of Jesus Christ to his apostles, and all their successors. Mat. 28. 20. *Teaching them to observe whatsoever I command you.*—The covenant with Adam, required perfect holiness, without any provision for pardon in case of transgression.—The covenant at Sinai, written on the two tables of stone, called *the tables of the covenant*, containing ten commands, according to our Saviour's interpretation, required them *to love God with all their heart, and their neighbour as themselves*, in which the sum of all virtue consists ; (Mat. 22. 37—40.) But however it made provision for pardon to the true penitent, through shedding of blood, but not for impenitent sinners, Lev. 26. 1 Kin. 8. And it is acknowledged on all hands, Antinomians excepted, that repentance toward God, and faith toward Christ, are required in the covenant of grace, as revealed in the gospel. These ungracious covenants, therefore, are not from heaven, but of men.

P. My conscience is convinced. I am obliged to give up the half-way-covenant ; but it is with no small reluctance ; For what will become of my child ? Must it remain unbaptized ? I cannot bear the thought. What shall I do ?

M. Is it lawful for a minister of Christ to baptize any one without a divine warrant ?

P. No.

M. Is baptism administered without a divine warrant, a likely means to do a child any good ?

P. No. But where is your commission to baptize ? And what is the tenor of it ?

M. In *Mark xvi. 15, 16. Go preach the gospel to every creature.* Thus unlimited is the commission to preach the gospel. *And he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved.* The faith which entitles to baptism, is a saving faith. Accordingly when the multitude were pricked at the heart, on the day of Pentecost, Peter did not say, *own the covenant* ; nor did he say, *join in full communion* : But *repent first of all, and then be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, for the remission of sins, Acts ii. 38.* And with the same sacred regard to the divine commission, Philip said to the eunuch, *If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest, Acts 8. 37.* And it is a settled point on all hands, that if parents have no right to baptism for themselves, their children can have no right on their account.

P. Is it lawful for me to join in full communion, when I know I have no grace ? Can I answer it to God ?

M. You remember when the King came in to view the guests, he saw a man among them *not having on a wedding garment* ; to whom he said, *Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having on a wedding garment ? And he was speechless.* To make a false and lying profession, is inexcusable wickedness. It is true, there will be *tares* along with the *wheat* ; but it is the *Devil* sows them there, and not the servants. And if *false brethren* come into the church,

church, they creep in unawares ; they have no right to be there.

P. But does not my own baptism render me a church-member, and entitle my child to baptism, although I am destitute of faith and repentance ?

M. *Circumcision verily profiteth if thou keep the law : But if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. For he is not a Jew, that is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh*, Rom. ii. 25, 28. One baptized in infancy, who in the sight of God practically renounces his baptism when adult, as all do who reject Christ, and continue impenitent, is not considered by God, as entitled to the blessings of the new covenant, but as under the curse of the law. *He that believeth not is condemned already, and the wrath of God abideth on him*, John iii. 19, 36. And what right hath this man to the seals of the covenant of grace, in the sight of God, who is by Christ himself declared to be under condemnation and wrath ?

P. Well, if I have no right to baptism for my poor child, I must be silent. But I wish it might be baptized.

M. Will you allow me to examine the earnest desire of baptism which you express ?

P. I ought to be willing. I ought to know the motives that influence me ; for God knows them, whether I do or not.

M. I am glad to see your mind so serious and candid. If this temper should continue, I should hope all your doubts would be removed.—For I can tell you seriously, I am willing to baptize your child, provided you do understandingly, and with all your heart desire it.

P. And do I not ? I should be a cruel parent if I did not.

M. Baptism, you know, is administered *in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*. In baptism, therefore, you dedicate your child to God the Father, through Jesus Christ his Son, to be sanctified by
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the Holy Ghost ; and so give up your child with all your heart to the Lord for ever, to be educated for God, and to be for him, and for him alone, in time and to eternity. And do you love God to that degree, as thus to give him your child for ever ; if so, why do not give yourself to God, first of all ? You love your child, but you love yourself better. First of all then cease to be cruel to your own soul ; no longer practically renounce your own baptism, by turning your back on God and the Redeemer ; but act up to its genuine import ; give yourself to God, through Jesus Christ his Son, that you may become the temple of the Holy Ghost ; and thus ratify what your parents did for you, when they dedicated you to God in baptism. This is that owning of the baptismal covenant which God requires at your hands. Then bring your dear child, and consecrate it to God in sincerity and truth. This is the way, the right way, for a blessing. But if instead of this, you are moved only by custom, by a sense of worldly honor, by pride and shame ; and desire that holy ordinance to be administered to your child from unholy motives, as Simon Magus desired the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost to answer his carnal ends ; God knows it, and all the world will know it at the day of judgment.—Pray, how was it when your other children were baptized ? And how is it in general to all appearance when people own the covenant and get their children baptized ? Are they brought up for God ? Or only to serve divers lusts and pleasures ? Look through the country, wherever you are acquainted, the youth learn to dress, to sing, to dance ; but do their parents appear to understand, that they have devoted them to God ? And is this evidently their great concern to bring them up for God ? But to leave others, and to attend only to your own heart. Can it be true, that you have a heart to give your child to God, and yet not a heart to give yourself to him ? Think of it, my dear sir.

P. I must grant that it is absurd and inconsistent, for a parent to pretend to have a heart to give his child to God, and yet have no heart to give himself to him. But I do desire to give myself to God.

M. Pray, sir, what then hinders you from giving yourself to him? You may desire to escape everlasting misery, you may desire to be happy for ever; so Balaam did: Self-love may excite to this, where there is no love to God in the heart. But if you love God so, as to be willing to have him for your portion; if you love Christ so, as to be willing to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow him; you may have your choice: You may do as you like: *Come, for all things are now ready.* And if you would now in fact make this choice, it would put an end to your present difficulties about your child: Nothing, therefore, can hinder the baptism of your child, but your continuing to reject God and the Redeemer, by which you practically renounce your own baptism, and forfeit all the blessings of the covenant.

P. Shocking affair! My child unbaptized! None to blame but its own parents! What shall I do?

M. Is not God your Creator? Are you not his by an original, absolute, entire right? Is he not infinitely worthy of your supreme love? Were you not in your infancy dedicated to him in baptism? And have you turned your back upon him to this very hour? And practically renounced your baptism in his sight? So that dying in this state, your baptism will be of no advantage to you; you will perish among the uncircumcised, among the unbaptized, among pagans; as it is written, *he that believeth not shall be damned, and except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish!* And do you now enquire, what you shall do? Ah, may dear sir! The answer is plain. *Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.* And thus at last comply with the import of your baptism. And become a disciple of Christ. *And if ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. But unto the wicked,*
God

God saith, what hast thou to do, to declare my statutes ? Or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth ? Psa. 1. 16.—Pray accept kindly this advice from one who is your friend, and who is bound by office to act an honest part with the souls committed to his charge.

P. I thank you, sir, for your fidelity, and ask your prayers.—For the present, adieu.

M. I thank you for your kind visit. I ask the favour of another hour, when you are at leisure.—I am always at your service—and might I be a means of your salvation, it would give me joy, while I live, and after I am dead, thro' eternal ages.—I only add, if you will read what the late learned, pious *President Edwards* wrote on the qualifications for christian communion, printed at Boston ; and the Rev. Mr. *Green's* pieces on the same subject, printed at New-York ; you may in them see the truth confirmed, and objections answered more largely. And if after all you should desire farther conversation on this subject, I will be ready to attend when ever you will be so kind as to call upon me.—Only come at all times, as you have at this, in a serious, friendly, candid spirit ; remembering, this is one of the most interesting, solemn and important subjects. Adieu, my dear Sir.

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